

José Ramírez House
Corpus and Third Streets
Rio Grande City, Texas

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
San Francisco, California

JOSÉ RAMÍREZ HOUSE

Rio Grande City, Starr County, Texas

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ADDRESS: Corpus and Third Streets, Rio Grande City, Texas
OWNER: Estrella E. Raebourn, City Office, Harlingen, Texas
OCCUPANT: Abandoned
USE: Not used

PART 1: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The José Ramírez House in Rio Grande City, Texas, is an excellent example of brick town house building of the Rio Grande valley during the seventies and eighties of the last century. The typical dwelling of that time followed earlier stone precedents. A one room structure, or two rooms divided by a brick partition and adjoining each other, seemed to be the most common types of division of the standard rectangular unit. The roofs were shingled with wood and steeply pitched. Brick gables formed the ends, and these gables extended upward to form a very low parapet. A ridge pole extended from gable to gable, and rafters from eaves to ridge---thus making possible a sloping ceiling within. Doors and windows were one and the same. Invariably, this consisted of a high unit topped by a flat brick arch. There would be a fixed glass transom above a pair of solid casement doors. In earlier times, the doors would have been paneled; but by the time that bricks were introduced, doors were fabricated from solid material secured by nails to a wood frame. "Rejas," or window grilles of wood or wrought iron which covered earlier openings not used as passageways, are omitted from later structures. Heating was frequently accomplished by an open fireplace centered on the gable ends. A 'lean to' of brick or wood with a somewhat less steeply pitched roof was sometimes added to the rear.

The building type described served as the principal unit for the José Ramírez House in Rio Grande City. In this example, single units were built, then shortly thereafter similar units were built parallel to and adjoining the first unit. Brick 'lean-tos' were built on the patio side (east) with fireplaces for kitchen purposes. Across the patio, another unit was built to house either servants or relatives. The patio was further enclosed by a

substantial brick wall, thus affording complete privacy within. A cistern was located in the patio area for domestic purposes, though records indicate that water was peddled during the dry seasons.

Stables and other outbuildings must have been located on land adjacent to the site which is now covered by newer structures.

José Ramírez (wife: Exisa A. Ramírez) was a person of the highest degree of honor, and he was well respected in the community. His death occurred about 1910. Occupying himself with politics as well as his ranching interests, the house undoubtedly proved an asset to these endeavors.

During the bandit trouble along the Texas border immediately after World War I, the complex was occupied as a headquarters for units of the Border Patrol as well as the Texas Rangers. From the several sources investigated, it seems to have been unoccupied since that time.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES:

Mary Headley Edgerton Rio Grande City, Texas

Florence Johnson Scott 801 East Main
Rio Grande City, Texas
Personal interview

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Architectural interest and merit: The structure is rectangular in plan, with a long building to the west side of an open patio, and a similar building extending about half the patio length on its east side. The patio is enclosed further by brick walls on the remaining east side, as well as the north and south sides. The proportions of the units, as well as the proportions of the openings related to the units are excellent. The detailing is simple and very good. Though the structure is beginning to be a ruin, it weathered well in spite of the fact that there has been no upkeep for thirty years. The condition of the fabric is poor.
- B. Technical description of the exterior.
 - 1. Overall dimensions. The dimensions of the principal structure are thirty two by ninety feet. The total complex measures one hundred and forty by ninety feet.

2. Foundations. Brick, continuous bearing. Rio Grande City has an underlying formation of 'salpetre', or a soil containing large amounts of natural salt. This condition seems to have caused trouble in reacting with the lime in the mortar, and such foundation problems are standard throughout the vicinity.
3. Wall construction. Brick bearing walls. Brick is handmade, somewhat larger than today's standards. It is an attractive pinkish buff sand struck, which patinas well, though is rather soft structurally. This brick was manufactured locally using river clay fired with mesquite fagots. Into the mortar (lime, probably of local manufacture) was added a brew of cactus juice, presumably to make the bricks 'stick better,' but may have been an additive to counteract the saline condition mentioned in the sand above. It is strange that there is little efflorescence noticed in the brick walls in the neighborhood, but this may in part be due to the arid climate. Common bond.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc. 'Lean to' porches, some enclosed, on the patio side of the main structure. These were obviously added, and not a part of the original construction.
5. Chimneys. Brick chimneys centered on gables in main structure, and there is one large brick chimney for cooking purposes in the kitchen portion.
6. Openings. Doors and windows are one and the same. Flat brick arch (double rowlock) above well proportioned opening. Fixed glass transom over two wood doors. Doors fabricated of diagonal beaded material secured to a wood frame. All wood is pine.
7. Roof. Roof pitched steeply over principal buildings with shallow pitches over lean tos. All roofs covered with wood shingles. Eaves are of wood, except that gables extend to form low parapets at end walls. Brick projects at parapet to end wall and to cast a shadow.

C. Technical description of interior.

1. Floor Plans. See 'Historical Information' and 'Architectural interest and merit' above.
2. Stairways. None.
3. Flooring. Pine on wood joists in some areas; tile on earth in other areas.

4. Wall and ceiling finish. Walls are covered with smooth lime plaster. Ceiling slopes with roof and is covered with beaded wood ceiling.
5. Doorways and doors. Pine, made from material identical to ceiling.
6. Trim. Pine.
7. Hardware. Not important.
8. Lighting. None. Probably used kerosene lamps.
9. Heating. Fireplaces in brick end walls with wooden mantles.

D. Site.

1. Orientation. Third Street runs northwest to southeast. Corpus street runs north east to southwest. Complex is parallel to street directions.
2. Enclosures. Brick wall encloses patio not enclosed by buildings.
3. Outbuildings. One outbuilding same construction as main portion. Stables not extant.
4. Walks, driveways, etc. Not extant.
5. Landscaping, gardens, etc. These likely did exist, but are unknown. The entire patio is overgrown with mesquite.

PREPARED BY W. Eugene George, Jr. 9 December 1961
W. Eugene George, Jr., A. I. A.

APPROVED Charles S. Pope DATE January 9, 1962
Architect, Historic Structures, WODC - NPS